

IN THE FOOTSTEPS
OF
MY GOING

AUNT PAULINE'S
2ND HUSBAND

BY
E. H. (DRIK) JOHNSON

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OF
MY GOING

Poems by
E. H. (Drik) Johnson

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*To Evelyn,
who walks beside me.*

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THE AUTHOR

E.H. (Drik) Johnson was born in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan on April 5, 1915. His parents were naturalized American citizens of Finnish extraction, and Drik speaks both English and Finnish. Drik's mother died in 1921, and he and the other eight children in the family were reared by their father who is deceased now.

Drik attended public schools until he reached the ninth grade, then quit school to seek a livelihood. The Great Depression was on, and Drik wandered extensively throughout most of the United States, working whenever and wherever he could find employment. He has led an adventurous, oftentimes dangerous, life, and has experienced and witnessed many unusual events, including acts of great heroism, tragic suicides, blood-chilling murders, and other happenings reflecting the many facets of life. Drik's adventures and mis-adventures have had a profound influence on his life, and he often draws on these experiences when seeking material for his fiction, articles and poetry.

In later years, Drik completed numerous correspondence courses in Creative Writing, English, Latin, Etymology, Bible studies, and other subjects to prepare himself for a career in free-lance writing. However, it was not until after his marriage to his wife, Evelyn, in 1956 that his work began to appear in many magazines. Much of his material has been published under his own name, and some of it has been published under various pen-names. (cont'd.)

Most of his writing is done on a free-lance basis, but he has written more than fifty articles on assignment at the request of editors.

At the present time, Drik and his wife are doing free-lance writing, and are also editing and publishing 'WRITER'S NOTES AND QUOTES,' a 'little' magazine founded by Evelyn in 1951. In addition, Drik and Evelyn serve as Poetry Editors for 'OUTDOORS MISSISSIPPI,' the official, monthly publication of the Mississippi Federation of Wildlife.

The poems in this book were written over a period of several years. They reflect the author's views and observations on life, his love of nature, his religious convictions, and the peace and joy which his wife, Evelyn, has brought into his life. No attempt has been made to group these poems in separate categories according to theme and topic, for as Drik states: 'These poems were not written in separate groups and categories, but at scattered intervals in the footsteps of my going.'

INDEX

ASPIRATION	1
QUIET THINGS	2
THE IMPOVERISHED	3
A SWIM IN THE MOONLIGHT	3
FRESH SNOWFALL	4
THE DISSENTER	5
THE CHICKADEE	6
CAPTIVE	6
BEREAVED	7
THE HUNTER AND THE FAWN	7
FLIGHT OUT OF EDEN	8
P.O.W.	10
THANKSGIVING	10
IN MEMORIA	11
BEREFT	11
THE CALL	12
"...THE FIRST STONE"	14
CHRISTMAS -- NUCLEAR AGE	14
FOREST FIRE	15
CONVICTION	15
MOUNTAIN CABIN	16
THE PATH TO PEACE	17
PLANTER'S PETITION	18
INDEBTEDNESS	18
THE DAM BUILDERS	19
ACT OF MERCY	19
MOURNING GLORY	20
EX-SOLDIER AND THE DEER	21
DEMENTIA	22
LOVE STORY	22
PRAYER FOR A PRUDENT TONGUE	23
THE UNEMPLOYED	24
ENIGMA	24
A CYNIC'S REPLY TO 'CREDO'	25
ADDICTED	25
THE COOPER	26
GRACEFUL EXIT	26

THE CHURCH THAT AWOKE IN TIME	27
DRIFTER	28
DRY ROT	29
FULFILLMENT	30
WHO PAYS?	31
ONE SMALL FRY -- WELL DONE	32
DIVIDEND	32
LEAVE A BIT OF ME BEHIND, LORD	33
NO MORE SCHOOL DAZE	34
VISITATION	34
ESCAPE	35
NON-CONFORMIST	36
CELLBLOCK CHRISTMAS	36
WHY IS WAR?	37
THE JACKALS	38
THE SHEARER AND THE LAMB	41
I GIVE YOU A SKINNY SOLDIER	42
A BEREAVED MOTHER SPEAKS	43
A PRISONER TALKS TO GOD	44
CYCLE	45
DE-FLOWER SHOP	46
GENUS HOMO -- TELEVISION ERA	47
SPRING CREEK	48
THE PANHANDLER	49
THE HOMEPLACE	50
THE ABATTIOR	51
MEETINGS	52
BROTHERS	53
ECHOING HEART	54
IN AN OXYGEN TENT	55
WOOD CRAFT	56
VAGABOND	57
CRUCIFIXION	57
THE KILLERS	58
DOG GONE HEART THIEF	59
PORCUPINE	60
EVASION	61
HOW DO I KNOW?	62
PRAYER FOR A TIDY LADY	63

MILKY WAY	64
REVELATION	65
EPITAPHS	66
THANK GOD FOR FAILURE	67
UPON VIEWING A PRISON	68
NOCTURNE	69
IRON ORE MINER	70
SOUL-MATES	71
TO MY BELOVED	72
I WOULD GO QUIETLY	73

ASPIRATION

In through the window of my room
Some starlight fell, lighting up the gloom.
And my soul responded to the light,
It soared aloft in exultant flight.

I watched with longing as it flew
Through the infinite reaches of the blue,
While I, earth-bound, remained below,
Warming my hands in the starlight's glow.

QUIET THINGS

I love the quiet things --
The soft chuckling of a little brook
As it staggers through a cool dark
forest,
Pregnant with silence.

I love the tap-dancing of rain
On the crown of my dripping hat,
As I walk along a near-deserted street,
Watched by the mist-enshrouded lamp-
posts.

I love your quiet smile;
The silent communion of our hearts,
When we sit gazing into the glowing fire,
Our dreams dancing in its flames.

I love your sympathy,
Unspoken, yet saying so very much,
When the day has dealt me weariness
and care.
Ah, Love, I love your quiet love!

THE IMPOVERISHED

I pity the man who cannot see
Rugged beauty in an old oak tree,
Or hear the hymns the breezes sing,
When through its leaves they are gamboling.
Such a man does not see how flowers nod,
As smilingly they gaze at God;
Nor does he thrill to the song of a bird,
Beauty, to him, is only a word.

A SWIM IN THE MOONLIGHT

I swam across the skies last night,
While stars floated on the sea.
But when I tried to pluck a light,
The stars all eluded me.
Then riding a cloud which was passing by,
I attempted to capture the moon,
But it flew back to its place on high,
And the sea was but sea, too soon.

FRESH SNOWFALL

The wildfolk print their newspaper again,
Their stories neatly typed on glistening

snow,

Depicting life as lived there in the glen,
Such joys and tragedies as we, too, know.

A mouse's fragile etchings are displayed,
Between news items of the neighborhood.
Down by the creek, the paper's edge is frayed,
Where muskrats tore it in a search for food.

An item says the rabbits have their young.
The frisky squirrel has taken him a wife.
Well, let us hope she isn't too high-strung;
He is not the kind to lead a quiet life!

Alas, there has been a big increase in crime;
The vicious weasels have been on the prowl.
Their blood-lust always rises in snow-time;
They are even crueler killers than the owl.

Ah, there is much for wood-wise eyes to read,
All clearly typed upon the sheet of snow.
How much men miss, who live life at high-
speed!

How much of Life that they will never know.

THE DISSENTER

There was this sickness in his brain, and so
They locked him up and then watched it grow,
And learnedly discussed his complex case,
While he watched them with a tortured face.

They probed his mind and they pierced his brain,
But their combined efforts were all in vain.
Then they shook their heads for this was bad;
Far safer, they thought, to declare him mad.

For he hated war and refused to fight;
Said it was wrong in his Savior's sight.
He publicly preached against conquest and
greed,
And quoted aloud the Apostle's Creed.

The leaders had heard and had grown alarmed
Over the number of followers he had charmed,
So they had him seized and locked up tight,
Then they spread word he was 'not quite
right.'

The 'madman' prayed in his padded cell,
But his voice was stilled when the H-bombs
fell.

And after the horror, the war and the strife,
Peace came to an earth devoid of life....

THE CHICKADEE

It always makes me smile to see
A cocky little chickadee,
When through a wintry wood I walk.
Ah, little friend, could you but talk!

When out upon dim trails I go,
And it is forty-five below,
Though other birds cling to the nest,
You venture forth without-thrust chest.

Your heart is far bigger than you!
And more courageous than mine, too.
God pities lonely woodsmen, so
He sent you here for us to know.

CAPTIVE

I thought I could travel through life
alone,
And I tried my best to do it,
Despite the warnings of friends I have known,
Who said I would one day rue it.
But that was before you imprisoned my heart;
Now dear are the fetters that bind me!
For, Darling, I am lost when we are apart;
Come quickly, sweet captor, and find me!

BEREAVED

Dear God, be tolerant with me today,
So many dreams have gone astray,
So many hopes have waned and died --
Forgive me, Lord, today I cried.
You see, I yearn to have her back,
For without her my world is black.
Lord, we had such a little while --
And hers was such a wondrous smile.
Yet, though her time with me was brief,
Remembering it, lightens my grief,
For with her I knew paradise --
I'm grateful, God, though my heart
cries.

THE HUNTER AND THE FAWN

For a breathless instant while we both stood
still,
I felt a wondrous kinship with the wild.
This was our world, this fragrant, green-
clothed hill,
And God loved me, and I loved nature's child.
Its liquid eyes begged of me not to shoot,
Reproached me for usurping its domain.
For in its eyes, I was the untamed brute....
It was I who fled -- and I won't hunt again.

FLIGHT OUT OF EDEN

Always, the cheery light inside
A small house nestled in a cove;
Reminds me of the tears I cried
Behind an old wood-burning stove.

I wept, wanting to see the things
That lay beyond the hills of home.
Yet now my heart hungrily clings
To memories, the while I roam.

I miss the scent of home-made bread.
My mother's smile, and graying hair;
The way she tucked me into bed
After she heard me say my prayer.

I long to see my father's face,
So gentle, and so lined with care;
The hat which Ma called a disgrace,
And vainly coaxed Pa not to wear.

I yearn to see the friendly smiles
Our down-to-earth friends used to wear.
I'm sick of artifice and wiles,
And polite greetings, brief and bare.

I crave to eat plain wholesome food,
Such as I ate long years ago,
Without concern lest I seem crude
Because my forks I do not know.

Our little church I long to see;
Ma looked so sweet in Sunday dress.
Though Pa sat stiff with dignity,
His calloused hand her own would press.

To think I left all this behind
Because I wanted newer scenes!
Ah, foolish youth, I was so blind.
But now I know what a home means.

For I have learned the world is cold,
When one is far from friends and home.
Too soon the wanderer grows old...
Now I no longer wish to roam.

But alas, my parents both are gone.
Some strangers bought the house at cost.
Only my memories still live on,
Dreams of the paradise I lost.

P. O. W.

I close my eyes and see the rolling fields,
And breathe the autumn air, scented with sage.
It is then my homesick, longing spirit yields,
And hot tears flow -- for I'm locked in a cage.
Old dreams return to haunt me at year's fall,
White flags of deer, the whir of startled
grouse,
Smoke rising upward, climbing straight and
tall,
In a silvery pillar above an old farmhouse.
I miss these things, but miss you most of all,
When summer dies and autumn breezes blow.
Yet it is with joy I look to this year's fall,
For Spring -- and you! -- wait just beyond
the snow.

THANKSGIVING

I thank God for the loveliness of you,
For all the beauty stored within your soul.
I thank Him for this love so pure and true,
Which healed my wounded heart and made it
whole.
I thank God for my treasury of dreams,
In which you, Darling, play a vital part.
How wonderful and thrilling it all seems,
That such as I could win your precious heart!

IN MEMORIA

The years roll by, once more December;
The blinding snows fall once again.
With aching heart I still remember
The snows fell like this then.

A white mantle, shadowed with blue,
Spread thickly over barren ground,
Compassionately hiding from view,
The frozen new-made mound...

The stars shine down this winter night,
Just as they did so long ago.
Pray God, your star shines soft and bright,
To warm this heart that is grieving so.

BEREFT

He doesn't like children, so they have
 said.
He has lost his own, and his heart is dead.
They know not of his walks 'neath the
 pale moon's laughter,
Of his trysts with memory and that tears
 flow after.
They do not know that a small boy's grin
Stabs like a knife, hurting deep within.
But as from children he withdraws and
 shrinks,
My heart is too much alive, he thinks.

THE CALL

I sought to deceive my heart for a while,
With trickery, deceit and guile.
But its terrible hunger would not be sated,
My heart stood apart, and watched and waited,
And it stared at me, and loathed and hated.

Then, fleeing its stricken stare, I traveled,
But as the miles behind me unraveled,
My heart kept pace and grew more insurgent.
It cried for cleansing, and its cry was urgent.
But how cleanse a heart? With what detergent?

Some folks said tears would cleanse my heart,
So I pitied me, and the tears did start.
But my heart, rebuking me, softly said:
'Don't weep for yourself, weep for Him,
instead.
He has called to you, but you turned and
fled."

But who is this He? I inquired of my heart.
'You have known," it replied, "from the
very start.
Yet instead of joy at His call, you feel
dread.
Ah, fear not the Voice, fear its stilling,
instead.
For when you hear it not, you will know I
am dead."

Then my heart's hunger I understood;
Knew my mad flight would do me no good.
I dreaded, yet wanted, the Caller to meet.
But would He forgive my colossal conceit?
I, lowly tare, had dared think I was wheat!

Devoid of pretense, I fell to my knees;
My heart was tossing on tear-fashioned seas.
I strove to speak, but no words would come,
Gone was my eloquence, I was struck dumb.
Then, Lo! The Caller smiled down and said:
"Come."

"Come, wayward one, flight will bring no
surcease.
Only through me, can your heart find real
peace.
So why plunge headlong into desolation?
Your heart cries out against its isolation,
Hungering for the Bread of a lasting
salvation."

But I am unclean and unworthy, I cried.
"Was it not for sinners I was crucified?"
Then in my heart, Lord, let godliness grow...
God heard, and His mercies on me did bestow.
My heart is filled. I am saved. I know!
I know!

"-- THE FIRST STONE"

Once in the long ago, a thief
Hung on a cross at Calvary,
Begged in his agony and grief,
Forgiveness in eternity.

Another, who hung on a Cross nearby,
Forgetting His own grief and care,
Heard the penitent's lonely cry,
Heard, -- and forgave him there.

Can we as sinners do less than He,
When for our pardon somebody begs?
We who are as sinful as sin can be --
Not without drinking of bitter dregs!

CHRISTMAS -- NUCLEAR AGE

A time of greedy-looking eyes,
And shoppers' avaricious sighs,
Of taverns filled with maudlin throngs,
Juke-boxes blaring sacred songs,
As Ares-worshippers applaud
The birthday of the Son of God.

Ah, Christ above, must surely weep
On seeing how some His birthday keep!

FOREST FIRE

The warm rain falls like tears upon my cheek,
As if in realms above Christ weeps anew,
On seeing this spot so desolate and bleak,
Where formerly, His cool green forest grew.
Charred skeletons, still smoldering and hot,
Grotesquely heaped, upon the ground now lie.
God made these trees to benefit man's lot,
But careless man caused all of them to die.
Wild creatures, too, died in the holocaust,
The fluttering birds and terror-stricken
game.
God-given wealth, so irretrievably lost....
Could it be you, the careless one to blame?

CONVICTION

I saw Christ playing with the children,
And there were wounds upon His hands.
One urchin paused to examine the cruel scars,
Fingered them curiously -- and bruised my
heart.
Yet when I moved to gently reprimand,
Christ smiled at me, and my heart bled within,
For in His eyes I saw myself -- and Truth
laid bare;
The child was sympathetic, curious, about
the wounds,
But I, O God, I helped to put them there.

MOUNTAIN CABIN

(At Crestline, California)

The bluejays shrill, a-heralding the morn,
Just as the sun peeks over shady hills.
The shadows flee, and a new day is born,
And to its beauty all my spirit thrills.

I was a fool who disbelieved in God,
And sneered derisively at poetry and such.
But now I find my frozen heart has thawed,
So to this mountain cabin I owe much.

For I found peace while sitting on a hill,
And gazing down upon the sleeping town,
At eventide, when all is hushed and still,
And mountains wear a purple-shadowed gown.

I learned the joy of sitting by a fire,
Amidst a group of gay, light-hearted friends,
All watching as the pale moon climbed up higher,
Till it lit up the sky with silvery blends.

Though Fate decrees my path must now lead far
From all these peaceful, joyous days I've known,
No distance can be an effective bar
To dreams, in which these joys I'll own.

THE PATH TO PEACE

Children crying--how I hate the aching sight
Of youngsters crying in their loneliness and
fright,
Crying for the mother-love they've never
really known;
Makes me want to hug them and claim them for
my own.

War waifs scrounging for a crust of bread to eat,
Tatters on their bodies, rags about their feet.
Begging for a hand-out with hopeless, hungry
eyes;

Is it any wonder that my own soul cries?

Millions spent on rockets that go soaring
into space,
H-bombs exploding in a frantic weapons race.
Dollars for destruction pouring down the drain,
While war orphans whimper as they shiver in
the rain.

High-sounding phrases, "In God We Trust,"
and such.

We're a Christian nation--but not very much!
Time we put away our hates, guns and H-bombs, too,
Time to show our fellowman what Christian love
can do.

Jesus Christ is waiting to lend us a hand
Any time we're ready to take a Christian stand.
Let's overwhelm our enemies with a Christ-like love;
God will give us victory as He smiles down from
Above.

PLANTER'S PETITION

Forgive us when we fret about the weather;
We are so prone to grumble without cause,
Forgetting how all things must work together,
Fulfilling all Your purposes and laws.

This year our soggy soil yields little grain.
But You, O, Bread of Life, can feed us all.
And want can lead us to our greatest gain,
By causing us to heed Your loving call.

Oh, Lord, we pray Your harvest will be great;
May we all sup with You in high estate.

INDEBTEDNESS

Why must I feel so deeply for them all?
I cannot dry the tears of all who weep;
Nor can I stoop to help up all who fall.
Why is it then, that mine is haunted sleep?
Why must I wince when someone else feels pain?
Why should another's grief affect me too?
I asked the Lord and, soft as falling rain,
He answered back: 'Have I not felt for you?'

THE DAM BUILDERS

I called him garrulous, but then,
I did not know
That all his words were but sandbags
With which he built a dam
Around himself.

But now, grown old, I've learned
most men
Who talk too much,
Like me, are vainly building dams
Against the sea
Of loneliness.

ACT OF MERCY

I dried an urchin's tears today,
As I walked down the city's street.
He was afraid -- had lost his way
And journeyed far on tired feet.
His tiny hand still burns in mine,
And I still see his tear-stained face.
Together, we shared love divine,
As I walked him to his homeplace.
Back in his mother's sheltering love,
The wee tad smiled his thanks at me.
And lo, Christ whispered from above:
'This deed thou hast done unto Me...'

MOURNING GLORY

He had wooed her with avowals of undying love,
And she had believed.
But she found a fist of iron in his velvet glove;
For years she grieved.

For she felt that he had robbed her of her youth,
And he surely had.
Now at last she had to face the bitter truth;
Her man was mad!

In his small mind he nursed a grim obsession
To acquire more land,
With which he thought to make a grand impression
On neighbors at hand.

Why, his acres meant more to him than did she!
She was old and worn.
And so useless now that sickness had set her
From chores long borne. (free

When, finally, death came along and gave her
Her first in years, (rest,
Enjoying all the pity that kind neighbors on him
He wept large tears... (pressed,

EX-SOLDIER AND THE DEER

Ah, frightened creature,
Having fled into my barn,
You can stop trembling now,
You are safe from harm.

For I, too, have known
The spiteful crack of guns,
The fear of sudden death,
How unseen bullet stuns.

Lie down upon the floor,
Fear not the hunter's shout.
Here, I will close the door,
Now you just wait it out.

I have known like fears;
My barn is yours to use
Till friendly night appears,
Forever, if you choose.

DEMENTIA

Again the drums are calling boys to arms,
To play a deadly game of hide-and-seek.
And boys come forth from villages and farms,
While prattling politicians bravely speak.
'We have to save our country!' is their cry.
'You boys must fight a war to maintain peace.'
But politicians don't march forth to die,
And so their cries for war will never cease.
A generous God gave man the whole of earth;
He placed us here and let us roam at will.
But selfishness in man soon had its birth,
So, cheating God, we build borders and kill.

LOVE STORY

He saw the beauty that was in her soul
And, consequently, gave to her his heart.
She took its broken fragments, made it whole;
And thus it was that their love had its start.

The neighbors shook their heads for they were
 wise;
They knew such shamelessness would cost a lot.
But Love endured, for true love never dies. --
The lovers found the wedded bliss they sought.

PRAYER FOR A PRUDENT TONGUE

Dear Lord, give me a pleasant tongue
To match my own soul's cheer;
A sweeter song than I have sung,
When joyful friends are near.

Give me a gentle word to say
When other hearts are aching;
Brave words to brighten up the way,
When fearful souls are quaking.

Let me be generous with praise
When others good deeds do.
And if they commend my ways,
Let me credit it to You.

And, Lord, whenever I talk too long,
Just hush me up with a frown.
Remind me, when I think others are wrong,
I'm not yet wearing my crown!

THE UNEMPLOYED

You men of all races,
 With gaunt hungry faces,
Despair in your eyes,
 As you listen to lies;
There are bound to be recessions,
Good times and then depressions.
It's disloyal to ask why,
 Though starving kids cry.
Politicians know best;
 They will answer the test.
If you can't find jobs in peace,
Their war-dogs they will release.
When they have slain a lot of men,
You will all have jobs again.

ENIGMA

She spends her girlhood trying to act grown,
Till suddenly she finds her youth has flown.
From then on, so Fate has ironically ordained,
She tries to recapture what she first disdained!

A CYNIC'S REPLY TO "CREDO"

Say it you will, but deny it I must!
For, always a good man ends in dust.
Whether his name the people hail,
Or quite forgotten he rots in jail.
Whether he sweats for his daily bread,
Or steals a far richer cake instead;
Whether his work be blessed or cursed,
Or he does his best, or does his worst,
His bones will powder and his flesh rot;
He is certain to end in a graveyard lot,
For no matter how hard in life we strive,
We will never get out of it alive!

ADDICTED

Another rejection? -- If so, I shall quit!
My last go at writing will be this short bit.
I can't quit, you say? -- Ha! Don't make
me sore;
Haven't I often quit writing before?

THE COOPER

He made the wooden barrels with great care,
Proud of each keg and barrel that he made.
A craftsman, he, who thought it only fair
To give his best while working at his trade.
With loving hands he fashioned every stave,
And fitted all the hoops with superb skill.
To me, it seemed his shop made him a slave,
But no slave ever worked with such a will.
When we were boys, he used to call us in
To give us staves he had made into skis.
Later, I learned they came from his best bin.
How fine a trade, whose first thought is to please!

GRACEFUL EXIT

Perched on a limb of an old pear tree,
The genial moon smiled down at me.
I stared, entranced, by its witchery.
And I felt that God was very near,
For this was the Sabbath of the year,
Autumn, the season I hold most dear.
I prayed that I, like the falling leaf,
Will find Life's end a bright relief,
Unblemished by fear, regret, or grief.

THE CHURCH THAT AWOKE IN TIME

More members and more programs was their goal;
It soon became a church without a soul,
Content to walk along a worldly way,
Too program-filled to find the time to pray.
The teachers studied hard until they knew
Applied psychology, and they applied it, too.
But still the congregation acted bored;
It yawned quite frequently, and sometimes
snored.

Classes were formed to teach such things as Art,
Square dancing, games, how to stay young at heart.
And though the teachers thought it was much fun,
The congregation yearned to see souls won.
Then, lo, an upstart dared to break the norm,
Uttered a prayer not on the printed form!
Cried out in joy as Christ answered his plea;
No program, this, but what a victory!
The church awoke, as did some teachers, too.
They learned old-time religion is still very
true,
That hearts can speak better than eyes can
read,
And only Christ can meet our every need.

DRIFTER

Some men seem born to do great things,
Some seem destined to fail.
To some misfortune ever clings --
Or so the weaklings wail.

I drifted through this life of mine,
For years beyond recall.
But as long as I refuse to whine,
I don't feel licked at all!

I've known strange cities, lonely nights,
Raw hunger and cruel cold,
And have seen my share of tragic sights,
That's why I am young-old.

I've numbered friends amongst the great,
When I was doing well.
I've tasted hope, I've tasted hate,
I've known a prison's hell.

Yet through it all something I've kept,
Something I'm proud is mine;
Though oft in misery I've slept, ..
And wept... I did not whine!

DRY ROT

Within the secret chambers of my heart,
I have stored too much of Yesterday.
And now I fear that it may break apart,
Sapped of its strength by dry decay.

For I have learned that stored-up memories
Are not enough, that phantoms are not friends.
Without new dreams, my weary heart foresees,
A dead tomorrow as each gray day ends.

Today is for the living heart, -- the brave,
While yesteryear is gone beyond recall.
And if too much of it we try to save,
Our treasure turns to wormwood and to gall.

FULFILLMENT

I never really felt aware
Of how a woman wore her hair,
Or whether her eyes were brown or blue.
Never -- until I met you!

I never thought I'd be content
Unless I was free wherever I went,
Or knew how much a home could mean.
Never -- till you graced the scene.

But now my heart's no longer free,
For you have wrought a change in me,
And I shall never want to roam.
Never -- while you wait at home!

WHO PAYS?

He is a wicked youth, so they have said,
A convict whose conscience is dead.
They do not probe for what lies within,
Or ask wherefore and why he fell into sin.

They are blind to his need of a kindly word,
And only know what they have read and heard.
They insist that he suffer for doing a wrong,
But the prisoner pleads, For how long? How long?

What a fraudulent cure is the prison cage!
A destroyer of good, and a breeder of rage.
Yet people nod wisely, feeling righteous and smug,
So a youth enters prison -- and comes out a thug!

DIVIDEND

Yes, lock him up in a small stout cage,
Hidden away where none will see,
His repentance replaced by a sense of outrage,
Harden his heart, then set him free.

Fashion a church in the prison yard;
Tell of Christ's love to the convicts there.
What though you are vindictive and hard?
They fashioned the crosses they now bear.

Yes, rightfully yours is the role of the just;
Never forgive the prisoner who sinned.
When he is freed, all his motives mistrust.
Then plaintively ask why you reap a whirlwind.

ONE SMALL FRY -- WELL DONE

All right, go lie upon the beach,
To bake beyond the water's reach;
But if you're blistered when you quit,
Remember that you basked for it!

LEAVE A BIT OF ME BEHIND, LORD

The pains were really bad last night;
I bit my lips and held on tight.
I would not want for them to know
When comes the time for me to go.

I much prefer to let them sleep,
Than waken them that they might weep,
Although I'm frightened in the dark,
When life dims to a feeble spark.

Oh, Lord, I know You understand,
I would prefer to hold her hand
For one last moment ere we part,
But it would only break her heart.

Loved ones should not be made to cry
Over a sinner such as I,
So heal their hearts, and once in a while,
Let them remember me -- with a smile.

VISITATION

If, in the stillness of the night,
You feel a sudden stir of air,
Awaken, but please don't take fright;
It is only my heart standing there.

For my heart often spans the space
That lies between myself and you,
To gaze down at your sleeping face;
Thus, all Love's pledges to renew.

Yes, wake up, dear, if wake you must,
And sigh a dreamy little sigh.
Then close your eyes in complete trust;
Someone who loves you is standing by...

NO MORE SCHOOL DAZE

Dad may now read evening papers,
While outdoors the kids cut capers;
All their homework is done at last --
And Dad's relieved to find *he* passed!

ESCAPE

Shut-in, you say? Well, perhaps so.
But far from here in dreams I go;
Today I scaled Old Baldy's peak,
Then waded in the mountain creek.

And just last week I camped outside,
Up North, where fierce blizzards abide.
I even bagged a gaunt bull-moose,
That was feeding on a stunted spruce.

Next week, I guess I'll dream some more.
Perhaps I'll trek a desert's floor.
They say the Mojave is quite a spot;
I think I'll study it a lot.

So you see, my friend, I am not confined,
Not while I have an active mind.
And my mind can be shackled only by me,
Which means, my friend, I shall always be **free**.

CELLBLOCK CHRISTMAS

A pregnant silence reigns within each block;
Old memories leave little zest for talk.
And homesick eyes are just a bit too bright...
Christ pity convicts on this Christmas night!
For they have felt the sword of sorrow, too.
Tonight, O God, their wounds all bleed anew,
For, unlike You, their brothers won't forgive,
Although You died that even they might live.

NON-CONFORMIST

I have no illusions,
Or favorite delusions,
To take to a psychiatrist.
My problem, you see,
Is a worse malady,
With a baffling, bothersome twist.

For I *want* a psychosis,
Or one pet neurosis,
To enhance my personality,
'Cause my days don't conform
To the popular norm --
They are too full of reality!

WHY IS WAR?

'But why is war?' he asked of me,
My son whom I held on my knee.
His question caught me by surprise,
As did the grave look in his eyes.

Why war, indeed? -- What could I say?
That Life was bound to be this way?
What prompted him to ask me that?
Would not most answers sound too pat?

How could I say we fight for peace,
To bring oppressed nations release?
Within my heart I know full well,
That wars are but a man-made hell.

War solves no problems, this I know.
It only makes our problems grow...
I told my son our wars are fought,
Because Christ's teachings men forgot.

THE JACKALS

Five ragged hoboes crouched beside
A railroad water tank,
Look down on one who has just died,
The one they knew as Hank.

'What'll we do?' their leader growls.
'We can't just leave him lay.'
He glances at the stiff and scowls,
Then frowns and looks away.

'He's got some moola in his jeans;
I'll take it to his wife.
I knew them both in New Orleans;
She'll need a start in life.'

Four figures stiffen in their tracks,
And eye him with distrust.
'You wouldn't be a-kidding, Max?
You know we all are bust.'

Says one: 'You'll split it up five ways,
Or else we'll split your head!
Why, we ain't had such luck in days,
Having pore Hank drop dead.'

(Cont'd.)

'But, boys, you know I ain't a thief;
I wouldn't cheat Hank's wife.
If only you could feel my grief,
It stabs me like a knife."

'Yeah, Max, we know just how you feel,
In fact, we all feel bad.
But you ain't running this here deal;
We'll share what pore Hank had."

The jackals move in closer now,
Pushed forward by their greed,
As each begins to think of how
He'll splurge on 'heat" and feed.

Some of Hank's fleas transfer to them,
As they search for his gold.
(Those fleas came from the 'Lady M."
Hank had worked in her hold.)

An east-bound wails as it draws near;
They catch it on the fly.
Then joke and scratch their itchy gear,
While planning what to buy.

And at the tank the dead tar lies
Upon his bed of leaves,
His cold face grinning at the skies;
The joke is on the thieves!

(Cont'd.)

Five ways they split it down the line;
Each even drew a flea.
They'll soon be wearing coats of pine;
The Devil rocks with glee.

For those fleas came from distant Bombay;
On rats they used to feed.
But they'll drink hobo blood today,
Thanks to the hoboes' greed.

The jackals stole a dead man's wealth,
But Death's a jealous keeper.
It sent five fleas to steal their health;
Ah, what a subtle reaper!

For who fears little fleas like these?
-- The hoboes scratch their bites.
Bubonic plague then spreads with ease,
And five times death alights.

Five hoboes now lie cold and gray,
Devoid of life and breath.
For when they stole a dead man's pay,
He gave them all his death.

THE SHEARER AND THE LAMB

My dear, please let me put you wise;
Your mirror has been telling lies.
You're not as pretty as you think,
And you look silly when you wink.

My dear, you're much too old and fat,
To act as kittenish as all that!
Your tired eyes are much too bright;
Frankly, my dear, I think you're tight!

But wait -- that purse! Is that your money?
On second sight, you're quite a honey!
The kind of girl I am dying to know --
Come, ditch the party, and let's go!

I GIVE YOU A SKINNY SOLDIER

Yes, take my boy
And make him strong.
Fill his young heart
With jingo song.

Repair his teeth,
And feed him well.
Ah, see how fast
His muscles swell!

I, too, want him
To live in health.
But lack of funds
Precludes such wealth.

Now, thanks to you
Whom we make wealthy,
If he must die,
He will die healthy!

A BEREAVED MOTHER SPEAKS

Let's have no flowery speeches over the dead.
My young son sleeps, a bullet in his head.
(Dear God, I ask what is there to be said?)

Each week he sent me messages of cheer;
Assured me always that real peace was near.
(Don't let him know we are still fighting here!)

Please do not fire volleys over his grave;
He earned his peace -- a peace we failed to save.
(I bite my lips. God help me to be brave...)

Why must this show be staged here every year
To honor those who are no longer here?
(Was it for this, they paid a price so dear?)

We should give up this vain jingo display,
Silence the bands, bow our heads and pray.
(My Gold Star, Lord, feels very cold today...)

A PRISONER TALKS TO GOD

Sometimes, O Lord, the stone feels awfully
rough;

The steel bars seem to chill my very
soul.

And I grow weary, Lord, of trying to be
tough,

The while I watch my green years all
unroll.

Why is it, God, that men will not forgive,
Though Your Own Son won pardon for us
all?

Do they believe I have no right to live,
Or are they simply being mean and
small?

In any case, forgive them all, I pray,
For theirs, O Lord, is much the greater
guilt.

I know my Saviour dwells in me today --
But they doubt the power of the blood
He spilt.

CYCLE

Autumn is an artist with a careless brush,
Spilling many colors in his eager rush,
Daubing his canvas with red and gold,
Then rushing off to get out of the cold.

Nurse Winter tucks blankets around Mother Earth,
Hushes the household of children's mirth,
Sits by Earth's bedside and attends to her needs,
Till a new Spring at her full breast she feeds.

Spring is the new-born, all rosy and sweet,
Crawling about at Mother Earth's feet,
Learning to walk and to laugh and to play;
All too soon now, he will hurry away.

The teen-ager, Summer, is part child, part man,
Spring growing up -- how brief his life span!
Awkward and naive, but brave to the core;
Mother Earth sighs, and starts knitting once
more.

DE-FLOWER SHOP

Softly the petals fell
From a decaying Rose.
He, lost in carnal spell,
Learned how lust grows.

Trembling, he drew her near,
His loins aflame,
Felt he held something dear,
Gave her a name.

She calmly mentored him,
And from her core
A roseworm then entered him,
Commenced to bore.

Quickly she stole his youth.
He gasped for breath,
Blind to the brutal truth,
Seduced by death.

GENUS HOMO--TELEVISION ERA

His head's as small as any pea,
His seat's wider than it should be.
Soft is his skin, and deathly pale.
The living-room is now his jail.

He lives on lotions, soaps, and pills,
And suffers many new-found ills.
One seldom sees him out of doors, --
He's occupied with household chores.

Nights, after he washes the dishes,
He may watch video if he wishes.
But he must never, never speak--
Not while Squeaky is there to squeak!

His mate looks very much like him,
Her bulging eyes are just as dim.
None of their progeny have feet,
They, too, are mostly eyes and seat.

Ah, whyfore art thou, Video?
Methinks that thou art pretty low!
Poor Radio by thee wast slain,
But wherein did poor mankind gain?

SPRING CREEK

In the Spring it is trout in a shadowy hole,
That lure me back to the creek;
Its quiet beauty is balm for my soul;
The waters a sermon speak.

In Summer it is berries big and sweet;
The lazy drone of the bees;
The forest creatures I so often meet,
And the fragrance of every breeze.

In Autumn it is the roar of a gun;
The startled, elusive deer.
The pride in a trophy sportingly won,
When season's end draws near.

In Winter it is trap-lines long and cold,
The return to my warm log camp;
The adventure stories which at night are told,
By the light of a flickering lamp.

All nature's wonders seem to speak,
Calling, calling me back to Spring Creek.

THE PANHANDLER

The maudlin tears coursed down his grimy cheek.
Bravely he choked back sobs, and tried to speak,
As, pleadingly, he looked up at my face,
Then staggered by my side a pace.

'Help an old sojer,' he hoarsely whined.
'It's been two days since I last dined.
I'm on my way out to draw my pay --
Got laid off my job the other day.

'I ain't no beggar. Why, you can see that!
This is the first time I've ever been flat.
Not like them moochers allus on a spree --
I'll pay you back if you can help me.'

He stifled a hiccup, and I smelled 'Sterno.'
But I have him a dollar and told him to blow.
A mighty thin diet he wanted to eat,
For he entered a grog-shop down the street!

THE HOMEPLACE

Forlorn and grieving, it now stands,
Uncared for by the owner's hands.
The hedge is ragged, grass grown long.
No laughter there, or lilting song.

Within, its floors are bare and dusty.
The air is stale and cold and musty.
Its sagging front door creaks and groans,
Small boys have wounded it with stones.

Thus stands the old place, haunted, grim.
Mute testimony of our vagrant whim--
New horizons beckoned to our hearts one day
And so we left, ---the house now pines away.

THE ABATTOIR

I hate the sawmill's greedy whine
As it slaughters a bleeding pine,
And fear the ugly saw that chews
Its way into a tree's sinews.

I flinch on seeing the bones all piled
Out in the yard, naked, defiled,
And dread the whistle's cry for more
As tree-butchers remove the gore.

It is sad to think how callously
My fellowman can slay a tree.
Alas, that home of birds and breeze
Should suffer such indignities.

HOME COMING

I sought strange pastures far from the
fold.
Now I'm whistling in the dark as the
night grows cold.
Groping through a lonely wood, I'm weary,
lost, afraid,
Longing for the bright path from which
I've strayed.
I've garnered tinseled treasures,
tarnished now and cheap.
Things I thought of value, but no longer
wish to keep.
For I sought to build my mansions on an
alien land,
Now I find the foundations lie on
sinking sand.
The wine and the bright lights and laugh-
ter have paled,
The things I sought eagerly, I now find
have failed
To fill the desire and the longing of my
soul,
And I seek again the Pastures from which
far away I stole.
Oh, I pray my Father will forgive an
errant son;
Restore me in His household ere another day
is done.
For I have searched the by-ways but have
learned that at His feet
Lie all the things I need to make my
happiness complete.

BROTHERS

Let's have another drink, my friend,
I'm buying them tonight.
What little I have, I want to spend,
Come on, it's quite all right.
I, too, have wound up down and out
A score of times or more.
I've ridden 'rattlers' 'round about,
Slept on a box-car's floor.
I drank my coffee from a can,
And 'boiled-up' in the jungles,
And I respect the kind of man
Who keeps trying though he bungles.
I know how long a night can last
When 'sleeping in the weeds.'
No need to tell you of my past,
Much like your own it reads.
I carry ghosts within my heart,
No doubt you do the same.
And like you, from the very start
I've played a losing game.
But come, let's have another drink,
Leave sighing to the winners.
Let's take the hard knocks with a wink;
Be game, though shunned as sinners.

ECHOING HEART

My heart is filled with echoes, dear,
Since you have gone away.
Your lilting voice sings in my ear
As in our Yesterday.

And though I seek another's arms
To fill my echoing heart,
There's something lacking in her charms,
And we soon drift apart.

True romance cannot come to me;
It is already here.
I'm chained to you by memory,
And echoes of you, dear.

IN AN OXYGEN TENT

My starving lungs draw in the cold, clean air;
My eyes are closed, but I know you are there
Beside my bed. So much remains unsaid...

If I could talk, I'd speak my love for you
In phrases old, and yet so very new.
But I am mute -- the pain grows more acute.

I think of how much your love means to me,
Of countless things we planned to do and see.
Love, I was wrong to postpone them so long.

I recall all the busy times I planned
I would later pause to gently press your hand.
Why did I wait so late, so late?

My heart cries out to tell you there is hope.
The Valley is dark, but I shall climb its slope.
We must believe, rather than grieve.

And if God wills that we share future days,
Our love shall rule them, rule without delays;
I'll cherish you. anew, anew.

WOOD CRAFT

Mighty hunter was old Tom Hackett,
Back in the days of long ago.
And brother, can the old boy stack it!
He tops the tallest tales I know.

Tells of a time when he made decoys --
Meant to go duck-hunting come fall.
Didn't go, though, and he told the boys,
He just had too much on the ball.

Made those decoys so gol-durn life-like,
Six of them up and flew away!
The others, Mrs. Hackett, wife-like,
Cooked and fed to him next day!

Think that's all? -- You don't know Hackett;
He had a little bit more to tell.
Waited until we stopped our racket,
Then swore his decoys *tasted* swell!

VAGABOND

Seek not to detain me when I choose to go,
I am a vagabond, as you well know.
And though I tarry here beside your fire,
My gypsy heart still knows its old desire.

For I am not one to mingle with the crowd;
I long for quiet, when folks get too loud.
Give me the trails where deep silence reigns,
The winding rivers, and green forest lanes.

When horizons beckon, they destroy my will;
I want to explore beyond the next hill.
Let us part without any painful scenes;
Farewell is what loving a vagabond means.

CRUCIFIXION

Impaled
Upon cruel thorns,
The rose-moth writhes,
While love-dreams, pierced by
sharp words,
Die painfully.

THE KILLERS

They measured it with calculating eyes;
The trembling elm dumbly awaited doom.
Its leafy head gazed, pleading, at the
 skies,
While killers worked around it, making
 room.

Quite callously the men began the slaughter.
 "About six logs," one lumberjack then said.
 "This mont' I send some money to my daughter."
 "Bah! So you say, but you get drunk, instead!"

Their saw slid back and forth, it cut
in deep;
The tree's life-blood seeped from the
widening gash.
A six-log tree -- its stringy flesh was
cheap.
The old elm tottered, then died with a
crash.

DOG GONE HEART THIEF

I wish he wouldn't look at me
Like I was God.
It puts me in such misery
To use the rod.

Like when he chewed my Sunday hat,
Then cringed in shame,
And mutely begged me to see that
It was just a game.

His soulful eyes were full of tears.
What could I say?
Only what I've been saying for years;
"Aw, it's okay."

I just can't punish love like his;
It would be unfair.
What small price my torn clothing is
For love so rare!

PORCUPINE

He waddled down to the creek each day,
Chuckling over some secret joke,
A proud old man who would not give way
To any of the forest folk.

His armor of quills rattled and clicked,
Warning all to clear his path.
Even the bears knew they were licked;
They turned aside in helpless wrath.

Quietly, slowly, he would drink his fill,
Keeping a wary eye on me.
Then, wheezing, he would climb the hill,
Ludicrous in his great dignity.

EVASION

The shivering poplar trees stand guard,
Along the road that skirts our yard.
While at their feet the snowdrifts play,
As travellers hurry on their way.

Content to weather out the storm,
Here in the house so snug and warm,
I recline behind this pane of glass,
Watching the red-cheeked youngsters pass.

And I think, It is wise to remain inside.
But am I trying the truth to hide?
Do I say it because I fear the cold?
Aw, that's absurd--I am not that old!

HOW DO I KNOW?

How do I know, you shyly plead,
That you are the one for me?
How do I know you will fill my need,
That this was meant to be?

Well, how do I know the sun will shine
Tomorrow, as it shines today?
That is how I know you must be mine;
What more is there to say?

I always follow where my Lord leads,
For His leadership is true.
And when I asked Him what my heart needs,
My Darling, He led me to you!

PRAYER FOR A TIDY LADY

Dear God, give her a dusty room,
When she ascends to Paradise,
A mop and pail, a trusty broom,
-- She won't be happy otherwise.

Give her a flower garden small,
And sprinkle it with hardy weeds,
Geraniums, a-bloom and tall,
And all the garden tools she needs.

Let her have hosts of loyal friends;
Her gentle heart is made for love.
Assure her, please, as each day ends,
She makes things neater there, Above!

MILKY WAY

A majestic highway in the skies,
Illumined by the lamps of God.
My soaring soul along it flies,
While I gaze skyward, silent, awed.

Earth-bound, a-top the hill I wait,
Watching the skyway traffic flow.
Angels are staying up quite late,
Wraith-like, they wander to and fro.

But soon the highway will fade from view,
Lost in the light of a new-born day.
My soul will then return from the blue,
Tumbling down from the Milky Way.

REVELATION

You know the big secret now,
The mystery of the where and how,
That each of us must learn one day.
If you could speak, what would you say?

That your heart was forever stilled
The moment when your breath was killed?
Or did you reach a brighter shore,
Where you will live forevermore?

My heart cries out, "The Lord is true,
And He is taking care of you."
Then courage through me starts to flow.
He lives! -- You live! -- I know, I know.

EPITAPHS

Their names are written on the sides
Of boxcars in which they took rides.
Their names also appear on shacks
Along the miles of railroad tracks.

I have often wondered why it's so,
And now at last I think I know;
The reason why their names appear,
Is due to wistfulness, it's clear.

For hoboes are lonely, vagrant souls,
Without real roots and clear-cut goals,
Who long to leave some lasting sign
To prove they, too, shared Life's
design.

THANK GOD FOR FAILURE

Thank God for failure -- it brought me low,
Down to a depth that few men know,
Crushed me and turned my pride to dust,
Then whispered, 'Seek out God -- you must.'

Out of the depths to Him I cried,
Who for my sins had suffered and died.
True to His promise, He failed me not;
I won the Pardon His blood has bought.

Yes, personal failure was a boon to me,
Through it I learned true humility.
It broke my heart, but Christ saved my soul,
And taught me that Heaven should be my goal.

UPON VIEWING A PRISON

This is a man-made solitude,
A sign of human scheme gone wrong,
Wherein weak men are put to brood
Until their hatreds make them strong.

This is a monument to shame,
In which man hides his social ills;
Reluctant, he, to share the blame,
When have-not heart its revolt spills.

This is a sinister silence,
Which mocks the hopes of they who wait.
Ah, what a huge, wasteful expense,
To fashion factories that make hate!

NOCTURNE

The rustling darkness in the sleepy wood
Glides toward the water to quench its
 thirst,
Studies the tracks where a deer has stood,
Then crosses the beach in an eager burst.

The waters ripple as Night drinks her fill.
Stars fall on the lake from her blue-black
 hair.

She lingers, dreaming, as the air grows
 chill,
Then gathering her jewels, she returns to
 her lair.

IRON ORE MINER

He grubbed each day within a sunless mine,
Deep in the earth, where lay the iron ore;
Came out, ore-stained, and with an
aching spine
He hurried home to sleep and dream once
more.

On Sunday he would sit in his front yard,
His stiff white shirt worn with uneasy smile.
Forgotten now, his week of labor hard,
As gratefully he owned sunshine a while.

He planned that some day after he retired,
He would relax in some warm, sunny clime.
Alas, too soon, the poor old man expired,
Went underground -- to stay there for
all time.

SOUL-MATES

We who have known both loneliness and pain,
So little sunshine, so much blinding rain,
Are stronger, wiser, than the untried heart;
Now we are wed, and shall never part.

For we know the value of a second chance;
The worth of a smile and a tender glance;
The thrill of a kiss, demanding, yet sweet;
The pride of oneness, when our friends we meet.

Yes, we who have known the futility of tears,
Can face unafraid all our future years,
Secure in the knowledge that our love will
last.

Oh, Darling, rejoice! The die has been cast!

TO MY BELOVED

Remember the days when your world was new,
And you dreamed your secret dreams?
Those hidden dreams can now come true,
Impossible though it seems.

Sure, they grew dim when life knocked you flat
And hurled you into its mold.
But, Darling, I know despite all that,
Your dreams are more precious than gold.

For they are the real you hidden away,
The you whom my love has revealed.
And we'll share them together each wonderful
day,
For our hands and our hearts have been
sealed.

Yes, Love has a way of working things out,
And making our best dreams come true.
So always remember when you're plagued
with doubt,
My heart has been given to you!

I WOULD GO QUIETLY

I think it would be easier to leave
During the night, when darkness veils the earth,
For then I would not be so apt to grieve
Over the joys which give this life its worth.

It would be painful, Lord, to leave behind
The fields she loves, the trees and singing birds,
Unless the night should make me nearly blind
To all such things, and deaf to grief-torn words.

I would go quietly while loved ones rest;
No futile tears, no anguished prayers or cries.
Yes, quietly--and quickly--would be best.
We shall meet again, so why say our goodbyes?

Lord, sun-time is so cheerily beguiling,
The shadowed vale would look too dark and deep,
But in the night I can walk through it smiling;
Holding Your hand, the way won't seem too steep.

Take me at night, and whisper to her at sunrise.
Say that I wait for her beyond the door.
Comfort her, Lord, and brighten her sad eyes,
Till she rejoins me forevermore.